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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 001218

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT RE-ELECTED IN FAR-WEST AUSTRIA, BUT FAR-RIGHT ALSO GAINS; SOCIAL DEMOCRATS BATTERED

REF: VIENNA 1171

Classified By: Econ/Pol Counselor Dean Yap. Reason: 1.4(b) and (d).

**¶1.** (U) Summary. On Sept. 20, voters in Austria's far-west state of Vorarlberg returned the state government to the hands of popular governor Herbert Sausgruber whose conservative (OVP) party took nearly 51% of the vote, providing the majority Sausgruber demanded if he were to stay on. However, the electorate also nearly doubled the vote for the right-populist Freedom Party (FPO), which took over 25%, just two points shy of its 2009 record and 5% better than polls had suggested. However, victory for the FPO comes at the cost of office. Governor Sausgruber has reaffirmed that he will not conduct coalition talks with the FPO because of anti-Semitic statements by FPO leader Dieter Egger. The clear losers were Austria's governing Social Democrats (SPO), lost almost 40% of their vote (compared to 2004) and slipped into fourth place in parliament, behind the Greens, who remained stable. End Summary.

The Numbers

	2009		2004	
	-- % of vote	seats	-- % of vote	seats
OVP	50.8	20	54.9	21
FPO	25.3	9	12.9	5
Green	10.4	4	10.2	4
SPO	10.2	3	16.9	6

Voter turnout was high -- 67.4%, up from 60.6% in 2004.

OVP

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**¶3.** (U) The popular, albeit narrow majority came as a pleasant surprise for the OVP whose goal had been to hold onto a majority of seats in the state parliament, which would have been possible with as little as 47% of the vote. The vote is being read as a personal triumph for Governor Sausgruber, whose threat to quit is seen as having motivated many voters.

His popularity is suggested by preliminary analyses suggesting that the SPO lost most of its voters to the OVE (or to apathy), rather than to the FPO. Having rejected the FPO, the Greens are the most likely coalition partner for the OVP, should he decide to invite another party to join the government.

FPO

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**¶4.** (U) The greater than expected success has been trumpeted by local and national FPO leaders. However, the dark lining for the FPO is Sausgruber's decision to end the long-standing coalition relationship with the party because of its leader's anti-Semitic remarks during the election campaign. The FPO's outcome also indicates that voters remain reluctant to admit to pollsters that they intend to vote for the FPO. The FPO appears to have gained votes largely by motivating previously apathetic voters to come to the polls.

SPO and Greens

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¶15. (U) The day's big loser, as acknowledged by both national party Chairman and Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vorarlberg party leader Michael Ritsch, who initially suggested he might resign due to the poor result. After the state party leadership gave him a vote of confidence on Sept. 21, however, he blamed the national party's failure to develop a clear position on integration/immigration for the debacle in Vorarlberg. The Greens, on the other hand, will be quietly celebrating their opportunity to join another Austrian state-level government, though numerically the election was a wash for them.

Comment

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¶16. (C) The Vorarlberg outcome will, though not dramatically given the SPO's historic weakness there, contribute to Werner Faymann's party management problems. Faymann has presided over a string of SPO losses (in state and EU elections) since his election as Chancellor. Worse news may be coming, as the much more important state of Upper Austria holds elections Sept. 27 (septel), in which the SPO looks set to do poorly. The FPO's successes, even if not directly at the expense of the SPO, will be a concern for SPO mid-level politicians planning state elections in 2010 in Burgenland, Styria, and Vienna. Indeed, in Vienna, the FPO has been putting up campaign-style posters for months in traditionally SPO neighborhoods that explicitly target the SPO and Mayor

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Haeupl. End Comment.  
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